

THE TELEGRAPH WIRE

COMICS
& CONIX

ISSUE 17

FREE!



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STALKING THE FAR-FLUNG FUTURE OF 1965
WITH **ZOT!**™ CREATOR SCOTT MCCLOUD!

THE MOST UNEXPECTED SURPRISE OF 1984



EVANGELINE

BY CHARLES DIXON JUDITH HUNT

THE HERO DISCOVERED.

MAGE

by MATT WAGNER



AND NOW

THE ELEMENTALS

VORTEX

MONOLITH

MORNINGSTAR

FATHOM



AIR



EARTH



FIRE



WATER

By Bill Willingham

COMICO THE COMIC COMPANY

THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK
OF A UNIVERSE THAT'S

FIT TO BE TIED



ALL CHARACTERS (C) Marvel Comics Group

A PERFECTLY FITTING EDITORIAL BY DIANA SCHUTZ

With many thanks to cheerful Art Nichols for this Marvel-ous logo, the following editorial is brought to you from the House of Four Doors. Enter at your own risk.

Phil Seuling died recently. I never met the man. I knew of him, of course. Head of Seagate Distributors on the east coast, a founder and recently-elected president of the International Association of Direct Distributors, Phil Seuling was ultimately responsible for the direct sales market as we know it today, and no one in this business could help but be familiar with at least his name and reputation. But though I never met Phil, he claimed a little personal stake in my heart.

It was the summer of '81 and I had traveled from the west coast of Canada to attend a teaching course at a New Jersey college. The college was a 20-minute drive out of Manhattan—a fact that did not escape this comics fan, especially in light of Phil's upcoming New York convention that July 4th weekend. Coming from western Canada where cons were (and still are) a rarity, I had never before been to a comics convention. And Phil gave me my first.

And what a convention it was! Three full days of fun and excitement for this starry-eyed fan. Three days of meeting and talking with creators who, 'til that point, had been only faceless names credited in the books I devoured monthly. I have Phil to thank for (indirectly) introducing me to such people as Marv Wolfman and George Perez, whose NEW TEEN TITANS had just begun to take a firm place on my must-read comics list; Eclipse publisher Dean Mullaney, who turned me on to the concepts of creator's rights and alternative publishing; Bill Sienkiewicz, who'd done only about a dozen issues of MOON KNIGHT at the time and who had yet to become the comics superstar he is today; Trina Robbins, my all-time favorite female cartoonist; Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly, whose RAW magazine had already deeply influenced my taste in comics; Howard Chaykin, Richard and Wendy Pini,

Mike Friedrich. I could go on and on. Suffice it to say that Phil's July 4th convention that summer of '81 left a profound mark on my life. Indeed, it was only a couple of months later that I decided to leave academia behind altogether, ventured out to California, and began working for Comics & Comix.

Phil Seuling died recently. I never met the man. And yet I owe him more than words can tell.

There's more disheartening news on the horizon, for those of you who don't already know. Pacific Comics has announced a "two month suspension" of their color line of comic books. As a result of severe financial difficulties with the distribution end of their business, Pacific is being forced to divert their total energy and attention to it before publishing can resume.

But will it resume? Already, Eclipse Comics has signed contracts to publish AXEL PRESSBUTON, BERNI WRIGHTSON: MASTER OF THE MACABRE #5, STRANGE DAYS #1, SIEGEL & SHUSTER: DATELINE 1930s, GROSS SPECIAL #1, and PACIFIC PRESENTS #5 (which will be released at artist Dave Stevens' request as ROCKETEER SPECIAL EDITION #1). Several other Pacific properties are either currently being bid upon or having their contracts negotiated with interested publishers.

Though Pacific claims it will be back in the publishing game in another couple of months, what will be left for them to publish? Remember the last time a small publisher announced a "suspension"? Will Pacific be next in line behind Capital?

I hope not—but hope doesn't pay the bills. I strongly urge all my readers to get out and support the independents now, before it's too late. For all of us.

THE TELEGRAPH WIRE #17, October/November 1984. Published bimonthly by Comics and Comix, Inc., 2461 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley, CA, 94704. Copyright (C) 1984 individual contributors. All rights reserved. Subscriptions: \$4/six issues. Publisher: John Barrett. Editor: Diana (on the road again) Schutz. Cover Logo: Tom Orzechowski. Cover Illustration: Scott McCloud. Printed at Western Offset in San Diego. All information contained herein is accurate to the best of our knowledge. This issue is for the Big Bopper. You know what I like!

EGGENTRIC EVOLUTIONS

by JOHN BARRETT
PUBLISHER

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created Superman; National (DC) published it. Stan Lee was an incredible innovator with a profound influence on our industry. Jerry Bails has often been referred to as the father of comic book fandom. But Phil Seuling was the person responsible for the comic book industry as we know it today.

Over the years I had heard of Phil as a mail-order comic book dealer--there were virtually no comic book stores in the country in those days--and as the director of the New York Comic Art Convention. Phil's NY Con was the premier show of its type in the country; held in July, everyone attended. The allure was so strong that in 1970 Bud Plant, two other fans, and I set off across country towards that comic book mecca. One of my co-travelers, Mike Nolan, had previously met and worked with Phil, and went on ahead of us to spend some personal pre-convention time visiting with him. One week before the start of the NY Con, we three remaining travelers had almost run out of money (with \$24 left between the three of us) and had certainly run out of places to stay. We showed up at Phil's apartment at 3 in the morning and heard some noise inside. Whatever possessed us to knock on a total stranger's door at that ungodly hour I'll never know, but we did. Phil answered and without introduction or hesitation, said, "Where have you guys been? I was expecting you two days ago!" He took us in, fed us, showed us the inside of the industry (got us hooked!), and put up with our California naiveté for two weeks. That's the kind of guy Phil was.

Phil was a teacher at that time and somewhat of a guru for young people. His personality was magnetic and his energy boundless--he believed that

sleeping more than four hours a night was a waste of the short time we have on this earth. With two daughters, Gwen and Heather, Phil had the largest extended family of anyone I have ever met.

At first using his own name, then later as Seagate Distributors (with partner Jonni Levas), Phil established the direct market. In the early to mid-'70s, comics were only distributed through "independent distributors" who also handled magazines, books, and often candy, tobacco, and other items. Because of their low cover price, comics were receiving second-class attention and were an endangered species. There were a few albeit growing number of comic stores in the country and in order to better serve their needs, Phil broke through the barriers and set up direct purchasing. This gave us better discounts and the ability to buy in the quantities we desired. Under the old "I.D." system, some titles were never sold (as there was not enough time to process them), and without Phil's innovation there may not have been any comics being published today. I still would not be surprised to see many of the magazine publishers follow suit. (Through the current I.D. system, "returns" are a giant waste factor and endanger publishers of all types. The direct market eliminates "returns".)

Phil was a founding member of I.A.D.D. (the International Association of Direct Distributors) and was recently elected president of that group. I.A.D.D. is comprised of the organizations that purchase comics directly from the publishers and is a further step in the professionalization and maturation of our industry.

Phil Seuling died August 21st, 1984. I will miss him greatly. So will our industry.

Comics & Comix

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ZOT!

**Are you
old enough --**

**-- to feel
young again?**



HE'S FEARSOME. HE'S FEARLESS.
HE'S STATE OF THE ART BARBARIAN
AND NOW HE'S AVAILABLE MONTHLY
FROM
EPIC COMICS

SERGIO ARAGONE'S
GROO
THE WANDERER

FIGHTING TO
MAKE THE WORLD
SAFE FOR
CHEESE DIP!



ON
SALE IN
DECEMBER



FROM MARVEL

WHEREVER COMICS
ARE SOLD

MAIN LINES

BY E. "SCOOP" YARBER

ADVICE TO READERS: Everything is moving around a lot in the comics industry right now, so you may want to keep a pencil and several sheets of graph paper handy to keep track of all this. Those who get ill on amusement park rides may want to pass this column by for the issue, since everybody beginning this will probably find themselves somewhere else by the end...

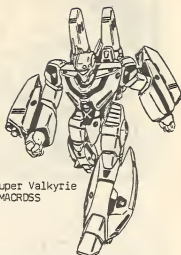
Pacific Comics has closed its line of books down for at least two months. The problem appears to be too much red ink in the distribution wing of the company, not the publications department. This will not affect Continuity Comics, distributed by Pacific. November should still see the first issue of Continuity's MEGALITH as well as the third issue of ZERO PATROL. Other books are looking for homes. The only deals that have been finalized have been with Eclipse, which has scheduled five Pacific titles for an October release under the Eclipse banner. The books are AXEL PRESSBUTTON #1, BERNI WRIGHTSON: MASTER OF THE MACABRE #5, STRANGE DAYS #1, ROCKETEER SPECIAL EDITION #1 (the full-length Rocketeer story originally scheduled for PACIFIC PRESENTS #5), and the GRDD SPECIAL (with the four-page story from DESTROYER DUK #1 added)... GRDD THE WANDERER lives up to his name this autumn as he makes the move from Pacific back to Eclipse and then to Marvel's Epic line in November, becoming the first creator-owned book to make the jump from direct sales to regular newsstand distribution. Sergio Aragones draws GRDD, with Mark Evanier as oneirocritic...

Another special coming from Eclipse in October is RAGAMUFFINS, three stories by Don McGregor and Gene Colan moving from their black-and-white appearances in ECLIPSE MAGAZINE to a color reprinting of Colan's pencils... The personnel titles of the Eclipse crew have moved around somewhat as former Publisher Jan Mullaney has decided to devote his full time to his music career. Dean Mullaney becomes Publisher, while Catherine yronwode is Editor-in-Chief...

First Comics has been going through staff changes as well... Joe Staton has left his post of Art Director to return to freelance work, although he will continue to draw E-MAN. Rick Oliver has been appointed Editorial Coordinator, which makes him responsible for First's deadline schedules. Oliver will also edit NEXUS and E-MAN...

Another newly appointed editor is Jim Owsley, now in charge of Marvel's Spider-Man books. Danny Fingeroth vacated

LATE NEWS FLASH: Marvel Comics has just announced a price increase on their regular line of color comics. All titles currently priced at 60¢ will sell for 65¢ as of January '85. This will include the new Star line of kids' comics, but will not affect either the Epic line or any of Marvel's limited series.



The Super Valkyrie from MACROSS

(C) Tatsunoko Productions Ltd., Harmony Gold Ltd., and Comico



Quagmire's Cutey Bunny

(C) Joshua Quagmire



(C) Valentino

the position in order to write THE WEB OF SPIDER-MAN... Another writing shift occurs in DAREDEVIL where (wait for it) Frank Miller will wrap up the Vanessa/Kingpin storyline in a two-part guest assignment in #219 and #220, to be drawn by (wait for it) Bill Sienkiewicz. Anyone out there interested??? December and January see the first issues of ten of Marvel's Star line of children-oriented books. Several of the artists and writers behind these comics

have previously worked for Harvey Comics, most prominently the late writer Lennie Herman and artist Warren Kremer, who are responsible for three of the ten series...

Aardvark-Vanahelm is raising the price of Valentino's NORMALMAN to \$2.00 with #6, shipping in November. Color process costs are responsible for the change... Joshua Quagmire's CUTEY BUNNY will not expand A-V's color line, in fact won't appear from A-V in any format. It seems a contract agreeable to both parties couldn't be devised, so Quagmire will continue to publish the bunny's adventures himself. The next black-and-white issue is scheduled for December. Until then, send Quagmire \$10 ppd. and you'll get your Cutey Bunny t-shirt. The address is Box 2221, Hollywood, CA, 90078...

Comico will publish a regular series adaptation of the Japanese show MACROSS. The panels will be redrawn versions of cels rather than blow-ups of actual frames...

A TV adaptation closer to home is V (not the Pynchon book) which moves to DC as a regular series written by Cary Bates and drawn by Carmine Infantino and Tony DeZuniga. First issue ships in December... Mike Baron, NEXUS co-creator, becomes writer of ATARI FORCE with issue #13. Ed Barreto and Ricardo Villagran illustrate... JONNI THUNDER, A.K.A. THUNDERBOLT is a 4-issue mini-series beginning in October. Written by Roy and Dann Thomas, the book gives one the rare sight of Dick Giordano handling both pencils and inks... SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING makes a move of sorts beginning in issue #31 when it will no longer be subject to Comics Code approval...

Well, the column's over and everybody's somewhere different than they were when we started, even if they only moved from the beginning to the end of this. Tell my friends I have returned...



How often do we get a new book by an author that has been dead for more than 20 years? Not very. Usually when it happens the book has been rejected by everybody in New York, until some small publisher decides there is a following for that author's laundry lists. This isn't the case with FUZZIES AND OTHER PEOPLE (Ace, \$2.95) by H. Beam Piper; here, the actual manuscript was lost and only recently discovered. There were rumors that the book existed, but nobody had seen it until last year. Unfortunately, I have mixed feelings about it.

The book is fun, there's no getting around that. Once again we are on Zarathustra, the planet with an indigenous intelligent life-form that is short and furry. Once again, the differences between Fuzzies and people are playing hob with the legal system (if you can't show that a Fuzzy can lie, how can you prove they tell the truth?). And once again, unfortunately, the ending is a rather complete *deus ex machina* in the larger context of the series. But the predictability of the plot has little to do with how much I enjoyed this book. Piper has again told a good story. But he does it in a context of White Man's Burden colonialism that is difficult to accept these days. If you liked his other Fuzzy books, you will be much more pleased with this than with any of the Fuzzy pastiches Ace has offered. But I wish the book had a more modern set of sensibilities.

There's another book out which I've been awaiting for years. John Varley has finally completed the Gaeon trilogy with DEMON (Berkley trade paperback, \$6.95; hardback \$14.95). Here, the manuscript wasn't lost, but the author was: lost to Hollywood to write a movie script. That he was not too thrilled about the results of this job is shown by the way Hollywood is treated in DEMON: film is a metabolic byproduct of various camera-animals and Gaea's new "studio" is consecrated by the sacrifice of a writer at each of its twelve gates!

DEMON is primarily an adventure story. Cirocco Jones has come out of the alcoholic stupor that characterized her in WIZARD, and now tries to do the impossible: kill Gaea, the controlling brain of the living planetoid Titan. She doesn't really want to do this, but Gaea insists: Gaea kidnaps the child who is Cirocco's only hope of escaping her role as mother to the Titanides, a race of hermaphroditic singing centaurs. Cirocco's not alone; she has human and Titanide helpers, some of whom are familiar from WIZARD. But Gaea isn't alone either, and some of her helpers are pretty mean. There's lots of action, and in the end we find out what happened to Cirocco's old sidekick Gaby. Don't make the mistake of trying to read this without having read TITAN and WIZARD; but don't make the mistake of missing it either.

There's a new set of talents starting to move into the SF field, and once again Terry Carr is there

to bring out their novels. In the '60s Terry edited the Ace Science Fiction Specials. If you need to know their history, read his introduction to any of his new Specials. The first five new Specials are available; while they don't have the beautiful Leo and Olane Oillon covers that the other series started with (the new Specials have a very muddy and ugly packaging scheme, in fact), the quality of writing in the one book I've read so far is as stunning as anything in the old series. That book is William Gibson's NEUROMANCER (Ace, \$2.95), a dark vision of a computerized future that made me think of Delany and Brunner at their finest.

Case made a mistake and got his nerves burned out in revenge. Now he can't tie into the cyberspace computer network, and makes a living hustling information in Japan. But a mysterious stranger offers him a chance to get back into the computer network, and he goes for it. Now all he has to do is defeat the most sophisticated computer security programs in the world, and he may get to live. To summarize the rest of this book would be a grave injustice: the visual nature of the prose is as important as the story line, and the images will haunt me for a long time. Don't be surprised if this book keeps you awake until you finish it, and don't be surprised if you want to read it again. Now I want to go read the others!

There's a new Harlan Ellison essay collection from Borgo Press, SLEEPLESS NIGHTS IN THE PROCRUSTEAN BED (paper, \$7.95; hardbound, \$14.95; signed edition, \$30.00). Whether Harlan is talking about video games, television, or the death of his mother, he's fascinating and gut-wrenching. There are problems with the footnotes (they are keyed with daggers, rather than numbers, which led me to look on the bottom of the page rather than to the end of the book; and they all struck me as superfluous and somewhat intrusive) and there are problems with the ordering of the essays (there seems no real logic to the order), but these are minor quibbles. Harlan will make you think. Read this book to shake yourself out of a complacent stupor.

The last installment of this column included a noticeable typo. The list price on the Modesty Blaise book, THE NIGHT OF MORNINGSTAR, should have been one pound, seventy-five pence—not one dollar and seventy-five cents. The price put on it by Ben Stark is not a surcharge on the American or Canadian price. My apologies to anyone who took this amiss.

[Nine too -- editor and typo maker!] Tom Whitmore is a well-respected member of the science fiction and fantasy field. A contributor to various fanzines, Tom is also co-owner of THE OTHER CHANGE OF NOBBIT, a fine SF and fantasy bookstore, located in Berkeley's Sather Gate Mall, at 2433 Channing Way.



CONVENTIONS INC.

Dear Friends:

Djana, ye olde editor of **The Telegraph Wire**, was nice enough to give us this page (actually she charged us for it, but she's nice anyway) to fill all her loyal readers in on the next two upcoming **CREATION CONVENTIONS** in California.

CREATION CONVENTIONS began 14 years ago in New York but we've worked our way West always striving to offer attendees the finest in entertainment: big name guests, exclusive attractions, special events and surprises. We hope you'll beam down to one of both of these weekend extravaganzas:

CREATION SAN FRANCISCO: OCTOBER 6-7: We're at the Holiday Inn Golden Gateway at 1500 Van Ness Avenue and our special guests include **WALTER AND LOUISE SIMONSON** (of **THOR** and **POWER PACK** fame respectively), **MERRIT BUTRICK** (David of **STAR TREK II** and **III**), and **TERRY NATION** (creator of **DR. WHO**'s Daleks and several British TV series in the fantasy field). We'll have auctions, costume and art contests, rare **DR. WHO** episodes and **THE DR. WHO FAN CLUB OF AMERICA**, slideshow presentations, "sound alike" contests, The Star Trek Bloopers, a talk about plot ideas for **STAR TREK 4**, and much, much more! And, of course, the giant dealers room filled to the rafters with tons of vintage comics, original artwork, **STAR TREK** and **DR. WHO** stuff! We're open from 11 AM to 7 PM daily and tickets will be sold at the door for \$10 daily. You can also buy your ticket(s) in advance for only \$8 at any **COMICS AND COMIX!**

CREATION ANAHEIM: NOVEMBER 17-18: Look out! The place is the fantastic Disneyland Hotel, 1150 West Cerritos in Anaheim and if ever there was a place to hold a comic/media convention this is it! It's connected to **DISNEYLAND**, of course, but the hotel itself is an entertainment mecca on its own and we're pleased as punch to be here! We're open from 11 AM to 7 PM each day and our special guests include so far **Marvel's** fantastic editor/writer/creator **DENNY O'NEIL** and artist/inker **JOSEF RUBINSTEIN** and **Star Trek's** **SULU**, **GEORGE TAKEI** and tentatively, **DR. WHO** writer/creator **TERRY NATION**. Plus many more to be added. And there's the dealers, contests, auctions, slideshows, tributes to **Who** and **Trek** and mucho other attractions. Two fantastic days, we promise! Tickets will be sold at the door for \$10 daily, or in advance at any **TICKETRON** outlet for only \$8 daily. Don't miss the fun!

For those that require super advance notice **CREATION** will return to **SAN FRANCISCO** at the Holiday Inn Golden Gateway on **JANUARY 26** and **27** and tentative guests include **WALTER KOENIG** (Chekov of **Star Trek**), **MARK STRICKSON** (Turlough of **Dr. Who**), and **CHRIS CLAREMONT** (who needs no introduction to any reader of **The Wire** or any reader of **Marvel's** hottest titles: **THE X-MEN** and **NEW MUTANTS**). More information on this show will be available at **COMICS AND COMIX** in December.

Just a little space left and we'll take it to thank the fine folks at **COMICS AND COMIX** for their help and support with **CREATION** over the years. Their concern for you, their customers, is evident in the care they put into their stores, its special events and this publication. We appreciate them and hope you do too.

Sincerely,

Gary Berman

Adam Malin

For CREATION CONVENTIONS

MEGATON MAN JOINS KITCHEN SINK LINE-UP!

FIRST ISSUE IN
SEPTEMBER!

FULL
COLOR
BAXTER!





One of the freshest, most exciting new comics to surface this year has to be ZOT! The brainchild of creator Scott McCloud, ZOT! features a wide assortment of zany and original characters, first and foremost among whom is Zachary T. Paleozoog, a teenage hero from the far-flung future of 1965! Then, there's Jenny, an otherwise ordinary girl from the present, who really has much more fun in the future; Butch, a monkey who's really a boy; Uncle Max, an inventor and musician who's really much younger (in spirit) than he looks; Peabody, a butler who's really a robot; and Dekko, a walking, talking Chrysler Building who's really a man. There's more, of course, but we don't want to get you too confused just yet!

I first met Scott McCloud about a year ago on his last day of work in production at DC Comics, just before he was about to embark wholeheartedly on writing and drawing ZOT! for Eclipse Comics. Who'd have thought that this soft-spoken, shy young man was about to unleash one of the most bizarre (yet eminently readable) and just downright fun concepts on our unsuspecting comic book market?

It was my great pleasure to interview Scott in August of this year. The interview was transcribed by Eric Yarber, edited by Scott McCloud, with final edits by yours truly. Many thanks to Scott for his time and care with this project and for this issue's delightful cover illustration.

-- Diana Schutz

DIANA SCHUTZ: Why didn't you take ZOT! to DC, since you'd already been working there, rather than to Eclipse?

SCOTT MC CLOUD: Well, as a matter of fact, I did. I took ZOT! just about everywhere (which isn't playing by the rules, but I didn't know any better at the



time). What I took to Dick Giordano was a color portfolio: presentation plates of all the characters and a lot of other material. Dick liked the proposal. In fact, ZOT! was going to go up to Jenette [Kahn]. But in conversation, I mentioned the fact that ownership was very important to me and [Dick] admitted that DC, at that point, was unable to let creators own their own work. So we agreed that it would be silly to send it to Jenette because, whether she liked it or not, we'd only have to pull it when I insisted on ownership.

DIANA: How do you like working with Eclipse editors Cat Yronwode and Dean Mullaney?

SCOTT: Oh, quite a bit. They are editors, but that's hardly their only job. Eclipse is an awfully small outfit and they oversee just about everything significant that goes on there, so to call them "editors" is almost to belittle them because they do so much else. And in talking to Cat and Dean I've learned quite a lot about the way the business works and about quite a few other things besides. They've been good moral support, good editors, and most of all, they understand what I'm trying to do and they help me achieve that, which I think is the mark of a good editor in any business. In other words, they don't try to mold the artist into some preconceived notion of what he should be doing, but instead sense the direction that his work is already taking and try to show him how to get there.

DIANA: Has ZOT! been brewing for a long time? Was it something you'd been carrying around for years before it finally came out?

SCOTT: Well, of course, my storytelling techniques and philosophy have been developing for a long time. Most of the themes and specific ideas that go into ZOT! really surfaced only about a year before I

actually sold it, while I was still working at DC... and shortly after I moved to Manhattan, which certainly had something to do with it. Manhattan does strange things to people.

DIANA: Had you done any previous comics work or is ZOT! your first?

SCOTT: It's my first published. Kurt Busiek and I had done about 40 pages worth of finished comics, which never saw the light of day, for New Media Publishing, and that experience helped to make us a little more cynical... We now realize that just because they say they're going to print it, it may not work out that way. Those pages were fairly standard superhero material.

DIANA: Was Kurt doing the writing?

SCOTT: Yes, he was writing and I was pencilling, inking, and lettering. But it was really wretched stuff, and I think we're both relieved it never saw print because, even though it was good training and we learned a lot from working with two very good editors, Rich Howell and Carol Kalish, it could have been a real scar on our reputations if it had actually seen print. So it's just as well that it didn't. All four of us have moved on to greener pastures since then.

DIANA: I notice that Kurt and a fellow named Adam Phillips are listed as script consultants on ZOT! What contributions do they make to the strip?

SCOTT: Well, their contributions are similar to those of Cat and Dean when they're playing editor. Really, I could have said "Yronwode, Mullaney, Busiek, and Phillips--editors" and that wouldn't have been far from the truth. I go through the same process of sending them my material at various stages of the work and getting feedback over the phone. And they just make a lot of very helpful suggestions. ZOT! sort of reverses the usual procedure of having four or five people do the work and having one person edit it. This time one person does the bulk of it and four people edit it! [Laughter] And each one of them is indispensable, in their own way. So it's just a marvelous situation because I get all the feedback and none of the drawbacks, or very few of them, because I am not shackled to their opinions. They make many good suggestions, but if I honestly disagree on some point, and I can give a good reason for it, they won't stand in my way.

DIANA: I gather, then, because you had worked at DC and you had worked for New Media prior to that, that you grew up as a comics fan.

SCOTT: No, actually. When we were living in Lexington, Massachusetts, Kurt and I got to know each other in junior high school, and he introduced me to comic books then. Which I guess is fairly late, compared to most fans. I was about 15 years old.

DIANA: Right about the time when most fans *drop* comic books.

SCOTT: Exactly! In order to fit in with their peer group. I was an artist before that, although it had always been just a hobby. I had no idea that I was going to do it for a living. I mean, no way! I was going to be something "important", like a scientist or a politician. And there was no question about it that I was much too old for comic books at the age of 14. I really looked down on them. I thought comics were for kids; I enjoyed science fiction and I was very much offended by the comic book brand of science fiction, which to me was just completely preposterous. Still is, usually...

DIANA: Yet Dean tells me that you're a Kirby fan.

SCOTT: Oh sure. But again, I was a real late arrival. I became interested in Kirby's work long after he had left Marvel and even after he had left DC. At first I didn't even like his work at all. It was only much later that I realized that this man was more or less the architect of popular American comics as they are today. Kirby is one of my three big influences, in fact.

DIANA: Tezuka has got to be one of the other two.

SCOTT: Right.

DIANA: And?

SCOTT: Hergé.

DIANA: That seems less apparent in the book itself, although, yes, I can see the Hergé influence in terms of plot and details of plot--not to mention the fact that your main character is an adolescent.

SCOTT: You'll see a lot more Hergé in ZOT! starting with issue #5. His influence is growing on me.

DIANA: How did you come to find Japanese comics? They weren't as available in the U.S. then as they are now.

SCOTT: For a while I couldn't find them anywhere. The only things I'd been able to find were compilations of stills from films which to date are all the fans are interested in, even comics fans, which is a real pity. But I found Zen Oriental Bookstore in Manhattan, and that gave me some source for Japanese comics, still not as much as I'd have liked. Then one day a friend of mine and I were in a bookstore in Manhattan and we saw an advertisement for a new Japanese bookstore that had just opened in Rockefeller Center. It's called Books Kino kuniya, on 10 West 49th Street, and the second floor of this place has an entire wall filled with comics. Since the day I discovered that, about two years ago, I've collected upwards of 40,000 pages of Japanese comics. Including about 15,000 pages of Tezuka. It's marvelous. The Japanese, as a culture, may be the best storytellers in comics today.

DIANA: Is that the kind of visual storytelling you're aiming for in ZOT!? You have a way of blending words and pictures very nicely, yet I think that the words contribute equally.

SCOTT: Yes, there's an interdependency, certainly, and I wouldn't want people to just skim ZOT! and skip the words. Perhaps that's the American element or the European element in my work. My stuff is certainly not *all* Japanese. I was *born here*, after all. [Laughter] But yes, I don't let the script become quite as superfluous as it is in Japanese comics. I have a theory as to why they've allowed their scripts to become so *minimal*. It's a little technical to get into it here, but it is possible that someday I'll have to admit that their way is actually the most sensible, in the way that they balance script and pictures. Until then, my script is going to continue to carry some information which is not in the picture and which you really should read to get everything.

DIANA: The market tends to favor a highly rendered style--

SCOTT: Sure does.

DIANA: --and yet you've opted to work with a more cartoony sort of flair. Is that the Tezuka influence alone?

SCOTT: No, quite a few people have contributed to that. Even Kirby was more cartoony than most of what

we see today, and certainly Hergé was. I don't know quite when I realized how important the "less is more" philosophy can be to comics. Tezuka may have confirmed that suspicion. When I saw enough Tezuka, I think that may have been when I finally realized just how foolish it was to spend a day and a half rendering a face only to leave it looking like a magazine illustration. I just don't think that all styles work equally well in comics. I wouldn't go so far as to say that every comic ought to be cartoony. I try not to think in *absolutes*, like that, but rendering can draw a lot of life out of comic art and a cartoony—meaning *iconic*—form works much better as what I like to think of as a narrative component, which any panel of a comic book is. I have a lot of trouble putting it into words, but I think the Japanese market is strong evidence of the power of the simpler drawing styles, and it has nothing to do with making it easy to read. In fact, a very cartoony style makes it *harder* to read, in a sense, because it involves much more viewer participation. We have to take those few lines that describe a face and *make* them a face and give it an emotion and give it a history and interpret how the forms are described. There's an actual involvement which you don't get when you're given completely rendered artwork where all the work is done for you. When I talk about collaboration in comics, I'm aware that for me there will *always* be a collaborator, even if I'm lettering [the work], coloring it, editing it, publishing it, and doing all that. I'll still have the reader as my most important co-worker, because he's the one who makes it come to life.

DIANA: You seem to have a genuine knack for writing *real* kids, as opposed to the syrupy sweet variety one encounters most often in comics. Where does that come from? Have you worked with kids? Do you have younger brothers or sisters?

SCOTT: Well, I was "the baby" myself, with three older siblings. I haven't had too much direct experience with adolescents except when I *was* one. I guess I've kept in touch with it, though. For instance, I've held on to a lot of the music that I listened to as an adolescent. And I can remember how it sounded to me *then*, and still enjoy it on that basis. I've tried to remember as much of my own

adolescence as I can because I believe that's a very important time. As young children, we have a heightened sensitivity to the world. All our senses are more attuned to what goes on and yet we're very innocent. We haven't encountered a lot of the more disillusioning aspects of adult life. So we tend to look back on that as a very happy time. But when adolescence hits—which obviously has a lot to do with emerging sexuality—there's usually a clash between the heightened sensibility of a young child and the realities of the adult world. Then, when most people become adults, what happens to them is kind of a pity, I think. They lose a lot of that sensibility. They become numb and they conquer their problems by learning to ignore them and learning to block out the world to an extent. And that's when adolescence ends. That kind of adult who has managed to block it all out, who has convinced himself that the world is no longer one big playground and he's got to be serious all the time, has lost something very important. Max, in fact, is an attempt to show an adult who has overcome that and still retains enough of his childhood to be happy. But that adolescent period to me is very fascinating, because there's that struggle going on. We haven't tuned out yet, but we're starting to become overloaded. Too much is coming in all at once. Sometimes I almost like to think that adolescence is when we're most human. I respect that period of my life. Many people that I've met tend to belittle the type of emotions and feelings that they had at that stage in their life, but I think those are very important feelings, no matter how naive or romantic they are and no matter how much we may discard them later on. It's worth it to go back and re-evaluate yourself from the point of view of that adolescent version of yourself. As for my scripting of them...I don't know, I just let it ride. I try to think of them as people and identify with them rather than trying to box them in my limited idea of what a child should speak like.

DIANA: Given that you're writing about children, do you see ZOT! as a book primarily for children?

SCOTT: No, and I'm glad you asked me that! ZOT!'s number one problem is that a lot of people assume that it's just for children. No way! Basically it's the same principle as something like *Pinochio*, the Disney *Pinochio*, in which the things that appeal to children are different from the things that appeal to adults, but there is something there for everyone. ZOT! is a very adult work. I'm working on a similar tack to what Wendy and Richard [Pini] were doing with *ELQUEST*, except that I'll probably never *show* an orgy. [laughter] Wendy at one point realized that what she was doing was, *first*, an adult work. That may be where we part company in that I think my book will always be for adults and children equally. I



(C) Osamu Tezuka



(C) Osamu Tezuka

One of Scott McCloud's major influences is Japanese cartoonist Osamu Tezuka. At left: a sequence from Tezuka's *VAMPIRE*. Above: the well-known *ASTRO BOY*.

will say this. At 24 years old, ZOT! is a book I would want to read, and I write it as such. I get as much gratification thinking of how older readers will react as I do thinking how younger readers will react, but I'm determined not to abandon either one of them. ZOT! does do well with younger readers and with older readers, but the readers in-between don't take well to cartoony art, because they're afraid that they'll be caught reading a kiddie comic and this scares the crap out of them! My classic example of ZOT!'s readership breakdown is that Keith Giffen likes ZOT! and Keith Giffen's daughter likes ZOT!, but Keith Giffen's fans don't.

DIANA: In that sense your work is certainly similar to Hergé's, with that great adult audience appeal as well as the child audience appeal.

SCOTT: Right. But for a period in-between there, readers will say, "Oh, I'm too old for this." We expect that to start changing once word gets around that this book ain't quite what everyone thought it was.

DIANA: I understand that there is going to be a fair amount of violence in issues #5 and #6. How do you think your child readership will react to that?

SCOTT: Well, at one point I had to admit to myself that there probably was a cut-off point, that below a certain age maybe a child shouldn't read ZOT! Unfortunately, I don't think you can standardize things like that. Children of the same age do not necessarily have the same levels of maturity. I think a good guide would be to say that if a child is at a level of maturity that the first *Star Wars* picture wouldn't bother him, then he's certainly ready for ZOT!—maybe a bit younger than that, they can also read ZOT! Very very young children or very *impressible* children might want to steer clear. In any case, I think a parent should preview every issue if they are giving it to a very young child. That's just a good idea overall with any comic book. The violence in #5 and #6 is not gratuitous (I hope). At least I try to only use it where it has meaning. There will be no excessive gore or anything like that. But some people *die*, some people that we get to know pretty well die. Well, that's heavy stuff. It's possible some readers will be disturbed by #6, but I think that I would be giving them cotton candy if nothing bad ever happened in my book. In fact, many of the readers who have not tried ZOT! do so in part because they assume it's a comic book that denies the realities of life, that it's just pure escapism and everybody's going to be happy and nobody will ever get hurt. As far as I'm concerned, that would be a very good reason not to read a comic book. Dying is a part of life. Hate and grief, misery are all a part of life. So they're all in ZOT! But so is humor, and there's plenty of that, I hope.

Photo by Ted Demme



SCOTT McCLOUD...just a regular guy!

DIANA: Oh yes. ZOT! is one of the few comic books that has actually made me laugh out loud.

SCOTT: I'm glad to hear that, thanks. That's the real measure of humor in comics, because there are a lot of moments in comic books that people describe as being very funny but it's a kind of joyless humor. They admire the cleverness of a gimmick or a routine, but the pacing and the substance of the joke just aren't enough to make you laugh out loud. I'm always trying for that *authentic* laugh.

DIANA: Now, I have a few questions which you may not want to answer. I've steered clear of asking about Zot's parents and so on—

SCOTT: Go ahead. Ask me what's behind the door.

DIANA: Well, that's the question! What's the great mystique surrounding the Door at the End of the Universe? Do you want to say anything about that?

SCOTT: I'll say *some* things about it. I won't tell you what's behind it, of course. Part of the fun of the door is finding out what people think is behind it. The key in the door began as just a plain old gimmick. No bones about it. I thought of the key as my training wheels. The whole key story lasts for a whopping ten issues, although they actually go through the door in #8. As long as this is the first thing I ever wrote, I felt I did need something to give the comic a structure even when I was floundering a bit. Something there in every issue to tie it all together, and the key has done that job pretty well. But when it's through, I'm going to have to start writing some *real* stories, ya know? I mean, for God's sake, I can't let *everything* hinge on this little plot device! As for the mystery of the door...well, it *is* a mystery, and what's a mystery without...the mystery? Without the suspense? And the door is all about suspense. I can guarantee a surprise in relation to the door. There's no chance that anyone in my audience is going to guess everything. Incidentally, no one involved in the project knows what's behind the door except me. I've even taken pains not to write it down. [Laughter] That way, if I kick before I do issue #8, I will have created one of comics' greatest everlasting mysteries.

DIANA: After the Key to the Door storyline is done, will Zot return to our earth?

SCOTT: Oh, sure. In fact, I almost look forward to some of the earth stories more than the stories on Zot's world. I should have a lot to say about our earth. I do *live* here, after all. [Laughter] There's a lot that ought to be said about earth that hasn't been said, that I don't see people saying, and what better way to highlight the things that I've observed about this planet than to have an outsider usher us back in? Of course, you can never go home again. When Jenny returns, it's a different place. Better,

in fact, in many ways than when she left. It will be a point of some irony that one of the byproducts of Jenny's finding a "better" world is that her own world, the one that she was so dissatisfied with, suddenly becomes a lot better too, because she gains perspective. One of the running themes of ZOT!, and of my own life it turns out, has been the whole question of how to gain perspective on what you do and what you are. The answer is, almost always, that you've got to step outside of it. For instance, very few fans understand Kirby because almost everybody they look at in comics is influenced by Kirby. They are surrounded by Kirby and they're unable to distinguish him because he's like the air that surrounds them, invisible. Only by stepping outside of that kind of comic--in my case by studying the Japanese and Europeans--can anyone expect to appreciate what they are all about.

DIANA: What about my favorite villain?

SCOTT: Dekko?

DIANA: Yes. Will we see Dekko again, or has he been written out at this point?

SCOTT: Oh, how could I resist bringing back Dekko? He's one of the most important villains in the ZOT! cast. I have a rogues gallery very much planned out, characters you haven't even seen yet have whole stories attached to them already. Dekko is one of the three best. He's a personal villain of Max's. Zot's personal nemesis, as we begin to realize in issue #6, is 9-Jack-9. Jenny's is a character called Zybox.

DIANA: He's the fellow with the TV in his chest?

SCOTT: Right. As the villains of main characters, those three have got to take on a stature that reflects that. Dekko was the first. I'm proud of him, I'll admit it. Dekko is one of the few characters I can look at and just say, "McCloud, ya done good!"

DIANA: Now speaking of Dekko, there was an Art Deco week in New York a few months ago with an exhibition at the Chrysler Building, and I understand there were copies of ZOT! featuring Dekko on display there. How did that come about?



ZYBOX

(C) Silver Linings



(C) Silver Linings

Zot's personal nemesis, 9-Jack-9, from the cover to ZOT! #6

SCOTT: Synchronicity! ZOT! #3, where Dekko first appears, came out just in time for Art Deco week--that was just coincidence. But two weeks before the show, I got a tip from a friend that this thing was being organized, and I called up Lee Fried who is Vice-President of the society, and she told me how much trouble it all was to get everybody included and how people had been coming to her all week with scarves and lamps and things, saying, "Oh please put me in the show," and she had to turn them away. And I suggested, "Well, how about this here comic book with this character with the Chrysler Building on his head? Wouldn't that fit in?" [Laughter] And my pitch wasn't all that good, but I managed to get across that it might make some nice "comic relief", ha ha. She thought it might work and we'd already made tentative plans to pull it off. A few days after that conversation she called me back and she had seen the *New Yorker* article and said that we could use it as text to explain the comic. So as it turned out, there were 60 copies of ZOT! which we donated to the society to put on sale at the exhibition plus a color picture of Dekko which Tom Ziuko had colored for me when I was selling the series. We recently got a letter back from Lee Fried--who works up at *The New York Times* when she's not doing this Deco business--and she said it went over quite well. People were very interested in the comic and it was a nice addition [to the show]. Which was very gratifying because the show itself was just fantastic! It took up two of the top floors of the Chrysler Building, which was especially nice, and there must have been millions of dollars worth of material there. Just a real once-in-a-lifetime experience for an Art Deco fan like me.

DIANA: Let me get back to the article in *The New Yorker*, since you brought it up. Now that's a rather prestigious magazine and of course we were all thrilled to see you and ZOT! show up in its pages. How did that come about?

SCOTT: A few people have already said, "Okay Scott, who do you know up at *The New Yorker*?" and I have to admit, well, I do know the fellow who wrote the article. But he insists that this is very much in line with the sort of things they cover in "The Talk of the Town" section. He said he showed ZOT! to



(C) Silver Linings

The demise of Dekko, from ZOT! #4

some of the people up at *The New Yorker*, and they got a big kick out of it, and the story was approved. I really had to twist his arm. I said, "Bill, you're not just doing this because you're a friend," and he said, "No, no! Really! It'll fit, I promise!" Or course, we wouldn't have done it at all if it weren't for Dekko. Dekko has been my key to so many things already...and I did realize that a comic book character with a head that looked like the Chrysler Building was just *The New Yorker's* speed. In fact, that one article is probably the best write-up I've had on ZOT! from any standpoint. Some very good comments there, funny quotes. Just a really nice overview of the book itself. So, I've pretty much overcome any suspicions that he was just being nice. In fact, I've since found out that he wrote three of the articles in that section and if you consider that *The New Yorker* is a weekly, you can begin to appreciate just why somebody would be willing to write an article about a comic book!

DIANA: Okay. One last question for you. When Scott McCloud isn't doing ZOT!, what is Scott McCloud doing?

SCOTT: Well, when Scott McCloud is doing ZOT!, he's listening to music. I should mention that, because I listen to music constantly--all kinds. Just in the last few months, I haven't been doing a whole lot else, because ZOT! takes up virtually all of my

time. I still go to movies, go for long walks and such. I guess my life is pretty *dull* right now! [Laughter] It won't always be, though. I know I'm going to make music, and I think I'm going to make films, but not for a while, obviously. I get obsessed with things. Traditionally, something will just come up and consume my life for years at a time. Before comics, it was chess. I went for three years as a fanatic chess player. Before that it was back-packing. Before that it was politics... There's always one interest that takes first place, that's the most important thing in my life at the time. Right now, it's a comic book called ZOT!



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Jenny and Butch enter Zot's world... the hard way!

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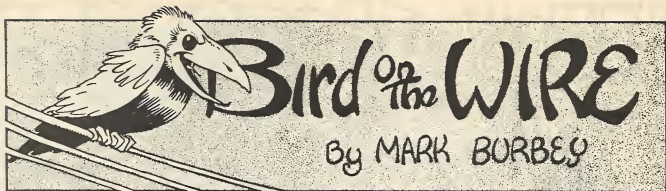


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Comic books. Most of us discover them as children. Most adults in our society hold the opinion that comic books are something we outgrow, like hide-&-seek and tree climbing. Yet, there are many of us, who as adults have not outgrown comic books. We continue to love them and continue to read and collect them. Why? A better question might be, why not?

Are you too embarrassed to read a comic on the bus? I'm not, though I'll confess to being selective as to which comics I'll read on the bus. I'd feel a little funny reading BATMAN or THE AMAZING SPOILER-MAN on the bus, but I have no qualms about reading SGT. ROCK, or SOMERSET HOLMES, or SIX FROM SIRIUS, or even SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING on the N Judah on the way to work. And again I ask, why not? First of all, I figure I don't know any of these people with me on the bus, and most of them look so bored and miserable, maybe they'd enjoy a nice comic to read on the way to work. Or maybe they'd prefer a novel. Or *The Wall Street Journal*. To each his own. But if you're a fan, and you'd like to read a comic on the bus, by all means, have the guts to set a good example. It just might catch on.

I don't think I read as many comics as the average comic shop customer, judging from the huge stack of new comics I see some people walking up to the register with. I used to be one of those people who bought close to everything, mostly out of habit, until they began to pile up, unread. I realized then that I was buying stuff I no longer found interesting, and when I realized that, I actually felt a sense of relief. Comic books had begun to bore me because I was habitually buying so many boring books. When I started buying only the books I truly wanted, choice material, good art books with good stories, I felt better about comics again. And that's how it's been with me for the last five or six years.

Even with this approach to buying comics, one can still find oneself with a lot of comics to read. You don't really know what you've got 'til you take it home and read it, even if the art is good. The MACHINE MAN mini-series by Tom DeFalco, Herb Trimpe, and Barry Windsor-Smith is a perfect example. The art is excellent, some of the finest seen this year, yet the series itself is a conceptual disappointment.

Despite this, and more importantly, it marks the return of a world-class illustrator to the world of comics. It's been a long time since an artist of Smith's calibre has graced the pages of a mainstream comic book. I'd watched Barry Smith develop from a Kirby imitator during his first days at Marvel, drawing NICK FURY and the like, into a much finer illustrator as he drew the first 24 issues of CONAN THE BARBARIAN, and then go on to earn himself a position among such gifted talents as Bernie Wrightson, Michael Kaluta, and Jeff Jones. It was a sad day for the

medium when Smith quit doing comics, but it was easy to understand why he felt the need for an extended breather.

Now that he's back, it's easy to see what a truly wonderful artist can do for a comic. MARVEL FANFARE #15 was a lightweight yet fun comic. This warmhearted romp starring the Thing was very much in the Lee-Kirby tradition, but with a bit more substance, in that it was something of a character sketch. It was also interesting seeing this artist, who had proven himself such a fine painter and intricate illustrator, fitting so naturally into the Kirby-Sinnott style of Marvel art.

Smith's art for the MACHINE MAN mini-series is a bit more organic, but the story is pure Marvel slush all the way. After seeing the first three of the four issues, I feel that Smith was essentially wasted on a basically feeble chase story. I was most disappointed in DeFalco's wise-cracking, vacuous script (though I must confess to finding Machine Man's commercial jingle ramblings a nice touch), and constantly found myself wanting more substance to creep into the story, despite the fact that the third issue was a definite improvement in this regard. The evil Iron Man element is a good one, but who is Arno Stark, this Iron Man of 2020? He claims to have "purchased the exclusive rights to the name and [the] armor after the original Iron Man's tragic death," but what are the details? What actually happened? This could have easily been expanded upon in lieu of some of the battle and/or chase sequences. Mostly, I find myself asking, what's the purpose behind this mini-series? The only thing that keeps me buying and reading is Smith's art over Trimpe's layouts. Their interpretations of the characters and various subtle reactions and human gestures are artfully expressive, and Smith's finely rendered finishes add such a rich, illustrative texture.

Smith's art on X-MEN #186 is just as excellent. I'm not a regular X-MEN reader at all; in fact, the last issue I read, #179, I hated. The characters simply didn't act like rational thinking people. X-MEN #186, with art by Smith, had a curiously surrealistic feel to it. I liked the way the flashbacks were handled, and the bit with the aliens assuming human form, while far from a new concept, was particularly chilling, thanks to Smith's art. I overheard someone in a comic shop say that Smith's art couldn't save the bad script in #186, that Claremont had written one love story too many. Well, as I said, I can't read the X-MEN every month, but I'd rather read a love story than just another cosmic superhero slugfest any day. And Smith's art made this a very affecting and entertaining comic for me.

The Bay Area's own Steve Lialoha turned in what was, for me, his best art job ever on OR. STRANGE #67.

The story was adequate-yet-standard Dr. Strange mystic fare, but the art was first-rate. Even better than his two issues of CODYTE...and a little reminiscent of Craig Russell.

My favorite comic from the month of July (aside from my standing favorite: SWAMP THING) was MR. X #1. I'm a big fan of Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez and LOVE AND ROCKETS, and I've been itching to see something by them in color. Granted, they had a color story in SILVERHEELS #3, but I wanted a full comic. And I'd been so tantalized by the promotional posters by Paul Rivcoche that MR. X had to be the most original comic debut of the year.

The Hernandez Brothers seem to have a very naturalistic approach to creating comics. They have a good sense for plotting and coming up with compelling and humanly interesting stories, and none of it seems contrived. They have an original, offbeat sense of humor that doesn't beat you over the head with its obviousness. They don't have to try to be funny or quirky, because it comes to them naturally. Their work has an immediacy that is rarely seen in comics. Most enlightening is their handling of their many female characters. They're almost always sexy, but not without depth and a certain brand of intelligence. Hernandez characters seem to function quite often on intuition. They are spontaneous, energetic people. In MR. X #1, I especially liked Gilbert's "Tales from Somnopolis." I really must refrain from describing it as "visual poetry" or something equally as trite, but this wordless 3-pager leaves a lot to the imagination while giving the imagination a lot to work with. It also reminded me of avant garde films of the '20s and '30s, German cinema, and film noir.

It is my firm belief that it is comics like MR. X that will bring more adults to the medium of comics. HEAVY METAL won't do it. TEEN TITANS and X-MEN won't do it, even if they're advertised on national television and given coverage on *Entertainment Tonight*. If new readers are to be brought into the medium, it will have to be with new material and new approaches.

I work in a custom framing gallery in San Francisco, and for display purposes only, we framed a couple of MR. X posters, and were surprised by the response we got. Women seemed to respond quite strongly and quite favorably to the posters. They liked the design and the "A City of Dreams Can Be a City of Nightmares" copy, and they wanted to know who this MR. X was. Some thought it was something out of Europe. Frankly, I can't imagine that they would have responded the same way had we framed some TEEN TITANS posters. It's going to take a lot more than comic shops in shopping malls to infiltrate the mainstream with interesting comic products. I'm talking creativity, maturity, and substance here, not just superficial flash designed to sell to the masses. That's how we got the A-TEAM. What Marvel aims to do with their new Star Comics line in terms of attracting very young readers is good, and books like Trina Robbins' CRISTY sound interesting even to me. But there are grown-up comic readers who want something that doesn't continually insult their intelligence.

And speaking of intelligent comics, I recommend that you give DALGODA a try. This is another title I've been anxiously awaiting, because I've long respected and enjoyed the work of Jan Strnad and Dennis Fujitake. DALGODA is very unlike anything else currently on the stands. It is a straightforward, entertaining, endearing piece of work. I like the characters, I like the fact that everything isn't pseudo-futuristic, and I like the fact that the

people act like real people. Fujitake's art can effortlessly go from being light and breezy on one page, to dark and serious on the next. Strnad's script isn't burdened with a heavy, contrived, cosmic plot, but draws you into a story with building ramifications. A lot and anything can happen. First-rate all the way. Get in on this one from the beginning.

In closing, "Bird On The WIRE" is exactly the sort of column I've wanted to write for some time. Diana Schutz, our esteemed editor, suggested the title (which has something to do with poet/songwriter Leonard Cohen) when we agreed that my original title was a tad dry. (Truth be told, it was my co-worker Timothy Wallace who originally suggested the title to me and I later passed it on to Mark. And "Bird on the Wire" is the title of both a poem and a song by Leonard Cohen. -- "Esteemed" editor!.) Despite the fact that in England "bird" is a common slang term for girl or woman, the title seems appropriate in light of this publication's name and the nature of the column itself. At any rate, this column is a chance for me to write something a little more light and breezy than what I might normally write for a magazine like THE COMICS JOURNAL, and I mean to have some fun with it. I hope that you will, too, and any and all letters of comment are invited.

And speaking of THE COMICS JOURNAL, I am very proud and excited to have been part of TCJ #93, which is a special SWAMP THING issue, featuring interviews I conducted with Alan Moore, Stephen Bissette, and John Totleben. To say that there is no other mainstream comic like SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING is an understatement. Rarely has a comic been so chilling, so deftly written, so...twisted. Some people save their favorite comics to read last. Me, I read my absolute favorites first, and SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING is the one I read before any others. In addition to the three interviews, THE COMICS JOURNAL #93 will feature lots of unpublished artwork, unlinked pencils, the samples Steve and John worked up to land the job on SWAMP THING, plus a few other surprises. If it's not on sale already, it should be momentarily. End of plug.

See you at the racks.

Mark Burbey has written about comics and film for such publications as RBCC, CASCADE COMIX MONTHLY, CINEMACABRE, and SWANK, is a contributor to THE COMICS JOURNAL, and wrote THE MARVEL GUIDE TO COLLECTING COMICS. He has also had a number of stories published in DR. WIRTHAM'S COMIX & STORIES.



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Schreck

"WHO YOU GONNA CALL?"
"NOT DINO!"

As I write, the summer is nearly over and still the boring tripe that was released back in June persists, like the bad case of heartburn one might get from eating a three-month old onion sandwich. I'm referring to the latest installment of this year's "genre" films, of course! You know, those great strides in cinema we all saw a few weeks ago. The ones with the subtle plot developments, superb acting performances, and the challenging new concepts that really kept us on our toes from the very first frame to the last. Films like CONAN: THE DESTROYER, STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK, and best of all, GREMLINS!!!

In my last article I said that GREMLINS could go either way. Well, it certainly did! I think that a law should be passed in Congress which would make it a federal offense for Steven Spielberg to even utter the word "cute" in his sleep! Also, if he so much as innocently jokes among the most intimate of friends that he is considering casting anyone under the age of 40 in his next project, I feel that a public (possibly televised) hanging is in order. Never mind cameos, I want kiddish crowd scenes! I want justice! Jeez!!! Talk about button-pushing!

DINO De Laurentiis and daughter, Raffaella, added yet another "masterpiece" to the roster this year--CONAN: THE DESTROYER! I don't know about you, but I was blown away by Grace Jones and her eloquent delivery of the provocative dialogue supplied by Gerry Conway and Roy Thomas. She really brought meaning to the word "Aaayyyyyiiiiiee!!!" And let's not forget that Oscar-nominating performance by Tracey Walter as Conan's "comic sidekick" Malak. The quote "comic sidekick" comes from Paul M. Sammon's article in CINEFANTASTIQUE's September 1984 issue. If Paul considers that comedy, I guess we can assume that he is a very big Jerry Lewis fan, but probably only collects Jerry's better, more recent film classics. I think CONAN: THE DESTROYER OF BRAIN CELLS is a more fitting title for this big budget turkey, and probably would have helped increase the sales at the box office just out of curiosity.

Now, on to a more pleasant subject. The only movie this summer that found that delicate balance between having a good time and insulting your intelligence: Make way for GHOSTBUSTERS!!! Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis worked diligently to fine tune their script into the perfect vehicle for Bill Murray's sick, subtle brand of humor, and backed it up with a lot of great sight-gags, some good belly-rollers, and just enough technical and spiritual data to support this bizarre experience. Although Sigourney Weaver's character is very lackluster, which I'm sure is due to script flaws and not Sigourney, I felt that the rest of the characters really came to life on the big screen. Especially Rick Moranis as Louis, who was the Ultimate Nerd and even better when he was transformed into Vince, The KeyMaster! A pure delight!!!

There are no words to fully express my admiration and respect of Mr. Richard Edlund (formerly of Industrial Light and Magic) and the rest of the creative geniuses who worked so hard and with so little time and still managed to deliver state of the art special effects. My congratulations to you all! After viewing the one sequence towards the end of GHOSTBUSTERS, one might hope that Mr. Edlund's next project could be a remake of the original GODZILLA. How about it, huh Rich?! Well, think about it anyway. (For those of you interested in the more technical aspects of film, I highly recommend you pick up the magazine CINEFEX. Issue #17 has a wonderfully extensive article on the making of GHOSTBUSTERS. Just ask for it at the counter in any Comics & Comix store. It's worth it just for the cover!)

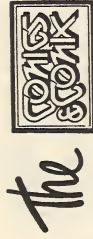
So, it was a romp through an expensive spook house, but at least the film didn't insult you as you went for the ride. It was well worth my twenty bucks--I saw it four times in three weeks--and I think I'm ready for another round! Besides, it's better than watching an overgrown humanoid with the acting capacity of a vegetable muscle his way through sand and bad matte lines, as he delivers the only piece of dialogue he can muster any semblance of conviction for: "Grow!" My sentiments exactly, Arnie! Better yet, I'll take "Goozer" instead! Now that we're back on the subject of dialogue, I'd like you to think about the last time you came out of a theatre with half as many great one-liners as GHOSTBUSTERS had: "This bitch is toast!", "Aim for the flat-top!", "It slimed me!", and "You usually don't find that kind of behavior in a major appliance!". I still get the giggles whenever I think of Murray's solution to handling their big visitor. Perfect!

I think the reason all this insanity works so well is that the actors played it straight. When it was time to be concerned, they were concerned and didn't just go from scene to scene cracking jokes for the sake of cracking jokes. When it was time for a dose of reality to keep things together, you got it. The characters reacted as any human being would if confronted by the exact same set of weird circumstances. It's a very simple concept to grasp, yet it's not so simple to execute. It's just a question of balance, you see, but as with all things, that balance is not so easily achieved. Obviously, I highly recommend GHOSTBUSTERS, so if you're one of the few people who hasn't seen it yet, you owe it to yourself to take the plunge. I don't think this film will appeal to everyone, but it's certainly worth giving it a shot!

NOTE: In the last installment of this column, while discussing the possibility of George Lucas continuing the STAR WARS saga, I jokingly pleaded with "Linda" to sweet-talk George into doing just that. Due to space limitations, that sentence was cut. The following appeared in the September '84 issue of CINEFANTASTIQUE: "After wrapping up work on INDIANA JONES and THE TEMPLE OF DOOM, director Steven Spielberg and producer Frank Marshall began scouting locations for the next installment of George Lucas' STAR WARS saga, which Spielberg will direct... Lucas was widely quoted when RETURN OF THE JEDI was released last year that he would swear off involvement with the series to take a much needed rest. Rock star Linda Ronstadt is said to have rekindled Lucas' interest in STAR WARS. The couple has been linked romantically in the press." I'm still in shock; I mean, my only reference to romance and Ms. Schutz, of all people, edits it out! Well, that's it! I'll never write about Romance again! SOB! SOB!


JUST TRYING TO BE,

BOB SCHRECK




CALENDAR of EVENTS

OCTOBER '84

SUNDAY	M	T	W	Th	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5 WILDER + LOUISE SIMONSON! 5-7pm STRING ST.	6 CITRUS HEIGHTS WHEEL of FORTUNE SALE! CREATION can in S.F.
7 CREATION CONVENTION in S.F. (PROMOTING TICKETS) AT 24-C	8	9	10	11	12	13 MIKE KAUKA NOON-2pm in C.H. 4-7pm in BERK! 5-7pm in S.F. 5-7pm in S.F. WHEEL of FORTUNE SALE!
14 MIKE KAUKA AT PALO ALTO CAC! --- 10-11:30 am --- SUPER SACTO ACTION 5-7pm	15	16	17	18	19	20 SOLANO MALL WHEEL of FORTUNE SALE! / ALL DAY!
21 THE CAC 12th ANNIVERSARY SUPER HERO PARTY IN PROCELY! MUSIC, PRIZES, SALES, SURPRISES!	22	23	24	25	26	27 PALO ALTO WHEEL of FORTUNE SALE! / ALL DAY!
28 S.E. IRVING ST. HALLOWEEN COSTUME CONTEST 2pm-4pm Juni Stonley, Rules!	29	30	31	HALLOWEEN 		

NOVEMBER '84

SUNDAY	M	T	W	Th	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2 SACRAMENTO WHEEL of FORTUNE SALE! / ALL DAY!
					8	9 BERKELEY WHEEL of FORTUNE SALE! / ALL DAY!
					15	16 CITRUS HEIGHTS CLEARANCE AUCTION! 8-10pm / SUPER PRIZES!
					22 THANKSGIVING 	23 S.E. IRVING ST. WHEEL of FORTUNE SALE! / ALL DAY!
					29	30

STORE LOCATIONS:

BERKELEY	PALO ALTO	SACRAMENTO	CITRUS HEIGHTS	S.F.	FAIRFIELD
2461 TELEGRAPH (415) 845-4091	515 CAMPER (415) 328-8100	921 K ST. MALL (415) 442-5142	6135 SHARISE (916) 964-0717	700 LOMBARD (415) 982-3511	650 IRVING (415) 645-5888
					SOLANO MALL (707) 427-1202

ALL IN COLOR FOR A BUCK-&-A-HALF

COLUMN OF CRITICISM & REVIEW

WALLY THE WIZARD #1 and MEGATON MAN #1

Although Bob Bolling's *WALLY* is intended for a younger audience (as part of Marvel's new Star line of comics), I found it much more satisfying as a humor book than Donald Simpson's *MEGATON MAN*, soon to be published by Kitchen Sink. The key here is *organization*. While Simpson's superhero parody contains a fair number of laughs, the laughs are all connected to comic book clichés. If these parodies are removed, the story simply doesn't stand up as a good story. There's no real beginning or ending, no payoffs to running gags. Any good humor book should be twice as carefully structured as a serious book, since a truly satisfying caper to a comedy story is pretty tricky to concoct, but keeps the whole book (or movie or TV show or play or whatever) from falling flat at the end. Almost all action in *WALLY* has some meaning to the story by the end of the issue, down to introducing supporting characters in such a way that the plot is moved forward. Bolling's medieval adventure is littered with throwaway gags as well, however, and the awful puns found page by page in this effort went well with a reviewer who is frankly a complete sucker for them. Although some people may think that laugh-after-laugh comedy in which a character, such as Megaton Man, can be a complete moron one moment and a successful romancer the next is perfectly valid, generally humorists working within a structured plot with definite characters produce work which is markedly superior. It bodes ill for the world of humor in general if the art of providing complete plots that are funny disappears.

KITZ 'N' KATZ KOMIKS #1

Fishy how finny they are. Wotz wid these kats, are they Krazy or something? By George, Bob Laughlin's two punning felines made me laff 'til I was pullin' my Herriman out by the roots. Previously available as collections of strips, the konfuzed kitties are now available in comic-book adventures that stretch the Engliz languitch to lengs as long as five pegez with nice visuals that shift focus like a Felix cartoon (another well-known kat) and stories that keep movin'. Our pig of the month, and that's a fat!

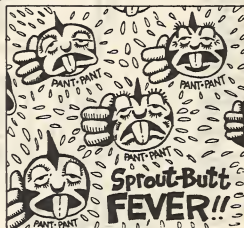
Available from Phantasy Press, 265 South Harlan, Lakewood, CO, 80226. Cover price is \$1.50, but send at least an extra 50¢ for postage.

TALES OF THE BEANWORLD #1-8

Self-published brilliance from Larry Marder. Marder has actually created a complete world in the pages of these short stories, a world that has laws and movements and mysteries in addition to interesting visuals. Considering that the norm for fictional

worlds these days seems to be putting unmatching elements together for ludicrous ends, like recasting the War of 1812 in outer space and calling it a fantasy, there's a lot to be said for someone who can come up with a system that actually seems *organic*. The stories draw one deeper and deeper into the Beanworld, and the complications are honestly fascinating. Our pick for next month. (Hey, we're a bimonthly!)

Issues 1 through 5 are out of print, but #6-8 are available from Larry Marder, 7060 N. Sheridan Rd., Chicago, IL, 60626. Although Larry doesn't normally charge for his Beanworld tales, you might be generous and at least send along enough money to cover the postage costs.

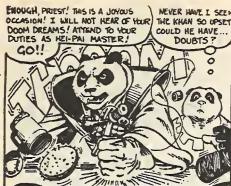


DNAGENTS #15

"Cadaver" is an interesting change of pace for this book. Almost all of the villains faced by the DNAGents have been high-tech gimmick-laden products of the industrial world. This time it's a rather bad-tempered reanimated corpse and some giant lizards who stir up trouble, while DNA'er Amber pretty much handles the action by herself. The artist for this issue is Richard Howell, and his art is well suited to the rather tongue-in-cheek Roger Corman A.I.P. horror-show feel of Mark Evanier's script. And yes, folks, Amber has her freckles back!

MR. FRANK GOES TO WASHINGTON D.C.

This is a paperback book by Phil Yeh, of the same general format as all those GARFIELD things. Different style and storyline, though, as Frank the Unicorn runs for Vice-President as the running mate of a black cleaning woman and wins. This gentle fantasy is not so much a political satire as an exami-



Panda Khan appears in PRIMER #8

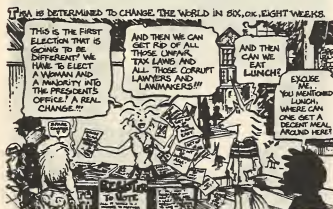
nation of why people aren't always doing what they could do in the wide scheme of things. All avenues of politics wander in and out of the story, from sidewalk crusades to Democratic conventions, and the general conclusion from each level seems to be that people mean well but get sidetracked easily. Yeah's plot is told in a series of one-page panels, each one filled to the brim with little jokes that can verge on microscopic. But it for the next time the newspaper headlines drive you to the rope. It's positive.

PANDA KHAN

Soon to appear in an upcoming issue of COMICO PRIMER. The premise is this: A colony of humanoid pandas (they have hands, the women have human breasts) with oriental names and clothing live on a far-off planet and worship the Greek god Pan. An army of living dead comes riding on giant bats and starts picking off the pandas with machine guns. The pandas manage, somehow, to rout them with swords. Although the reasons behind this situation are explained at first as being mystical, toward the end it seems technologically oriented. These various unrelated elements don't seem to be played for contrast as in DNAGENTS' "Cadaver", nor do they make an organic whole like BEANWORLD. A few touches of humor are sprinkled nicely through the book by creators Dave Garcia and M.J. Sharp, but generally the disparate aspects don't hold together. Not a bad effort, however, for the creators' first time out.

TIME SPIRITS #1

Time travel for mercenary purposes by mystical means. Tom Yeates' art is quite effective, expressive



Phil Yeh's Frank the Unicorn

wordless sequences being among the highlights of the book. Steve Perry's story suffers, however, from the fact that he doesn't give us a terribly clear idea of exactly what is going on. I suppose the exact premise will be revealed in future issues, but the story is weakened by characters suddenly displaying powers that the reader had no inkling that they'd had. How can one worry about a character when they may suddenly turn out to have a power that can get them out of whatever fix they're in?

MEGALITH #1

My gripe with most superhero origins is that they make it so easy to get super-powers. These days you almost always either get hit with enough mysterious energy to fry you, or you happen to be born a mutant (which in real life is usually something like a baby born with both arms growing out of its mouth or something equally tragic). In other words, no work. Well, Megalith is a tad different. This origin story shows how "The Ultimate Man" gains his powers by years of heart-stopping workouts coupled with ever-intensive study and mystical self-control. I think



(C) Perry and Yeates

Cusick and Doot from TIME SPIRITS

the possibilities of the human body and mind are infinitely more exciting than the vague promises of radioactivity or genetic disorders. One feels as though anyone could become a superhero, or something close, if he were only willing to make the effort and sacrifice his social life. It's just too bad that after all the effort, Megalith ends up just another Big Guy who punches his way through brick walls, spits bullets out of his chest, and makes a killing in the stock market.

ZERO PATROL #2

Romance in comics is certainly in for some hard times, if this book is any indication. Bruce, a member of the Zero Patrol, spends the entire issue bashing aliens around because he's fallen in love with an alien princess. Though obviously not a romance book, the plot of this issue is supposed to hinge on Bruce's passion for the princess, a passion we are not even allowed to observe for ourselves. How can we care anything about a love affair that ends with a "one kiss goodbye" which takes place between panels??? A hero who goes through untold dangers for the sake of a woman is much more interesting than one motivated by the usual brute altruism, but love is only another silly gimmick if it's handled as such.



COMIX WAVE is a registered copyright of Clay Geerdes, box 7081, Berkeley, CA, 94707. Vanity is (C) 1984 Will Neugnot. Used by permission.

American Flagg. Reuben Flagg. Born October 7, 2000, to Jewish parents on Mars. He grows up to become a successful soap opera hero. His stage name: Mark Thrust. His role: Sexus Ranger. Well, be-bop-a-lula. I saved up about ten of these funnybooks, then read them all at once, but before reading them, I made notes on the covers. On the first issue, the character is set against a background made up of pieces of an American flag. The title letters are yellow, but our hero who is going to put the flag back together again is not. It's a phallic cover with Reuben standing erect between a pair of balls. There is an overall Prussian tone to the image, one which flashes back to the early days of the country when George Washington's troops were trained at Valley Forge by an ex-Prussian officer (whose techniques are used in training camps to this day by the military). The red, white, and blue nationalistic motif is a flashback to the more propagandistic comics of the '40s, UNCLE SAM, MILITARY, MODERN, and, perhaps, STAR-SPANGLED COMICS. The eagle is blue on #1, although some bizarre color seps make him purple on later issues; he is looking toward his right wing; eagles always know where the better food is located. Flagg (the German form for "flag") is no lefty, however he may sometimes appear, yet one must not presume at this point because subsequent issues could contradict any pre-conclusions. The Flagg we see looks angry, vengeful; ironically, his features are very similar to Dan White, the former San Francisco supervisor who assassinated Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk back in 1978. Later drawings show him to resemble Richard Chamberlain.

On the cover of issue #2, Flagg has been joined by Amanda Krieger. Both are firing impossibly large weapons at characters off-page. Flagg, however, is supporting Amanda, whose left leg is over his right thigh. She wears a lavender mini-dress and stockings. Kind of a James Bond-ish opener. Krieger has several

meanings in German. "Warrior" is one. "Getting" or "acquiring" is another. Both fit Amanda and her Daddy.

AMERICAN FLAGG! is a non-linear work, as non-linear as a comic art story can get perhaps. Marshall McLuhan would have enjoyed it. Bob Violence. Great stuff. Sublims triggering mail rumbles between Gogangs and Plexus rangers. F.F.O., baby. B-b-but Violence is still posed as the answer to violence and just about every time we turn a page, there is Reuben shooting at someone or kicking ass. Just as there are sublims in Bob Violence, so are there sublims in Chaykin's panels, but what do they suggest? Are they heavy? Political? Most seem to be sexual. Sex is better than violence? Or sex is good company for violence? On the cover of #3, a too obvious phallus is below an arrow pointing upward toward a coin-slot which is superimposed over a woman's pubic area. Subtle. By #4, Flagg and woman are still the focal point of the cover. He has a much larger gun, but she stands in the foreground on her own feet. His right leg is raised and there is a large phallic image between his legs. Just why the woman is wearing such skimpy underwear is known only to Chaykin. I've read elsewhere about the underwear and stocking fetishism of AMERICAN FLAGG! as well as the heavy emphasis on bondage and discipline, but the reason for it is unclear. Most of the readership of AMERICAN FLAGG! would not be into stocking fetishism or underwear, since their hippie parents grew up wearing neither. Fetishism appeals mainly to those over 50. You drawing for those folks, Howard?

I'm enjoying AMERICAN FLAGG!; but, frankly, I think the setting and the technique are distractions, designed to titillate and entertain as well as make the reader think that something more significant is going on. We can see what is wrong with this futuristic society, but what is right? What is Flagg for? What are his values? Is there anything worth salvaging in the world he poses? Or are we just being trotted through the grand guignol, a little tour of the old wax museum, life inside the Betamax? Isn't the ultimate fantasy these days, who controls TV controls the world?

And isn't that cynical talking cat just another incarnation of Howard the Duck? Reminds me of the little yellow monkey who used to hang around with Crimebuster (see a copy of BOY COMICS). Scheiskopf is a good character, a refuge from James Bond with a bit of Catch-22 thrown in. Name means "s**thead" in



HOWARD CHAYKIN and CLAY GEERDES in San Diego



German. A PIA agent. That's cute. I like that. I really enjoy the mix of images, the idea of a comic book put together in the control room like a TV show, the characters borrowed from everywhere. Didn't I last see Harris Angrilli in *Rocky Horror Picture Show*? How about Or. Kronkheit ("Krankheit" is "sickness" in German)? Or Benjamin Siegel Boulevard? Or a language spliced together from black street jargon and convict patois or the humor of Flagg punching out a dominatrix who tries to make him sweep the floor with his tongue? Bit of the old Wicked Wanda there. Or Medea Blitz as a Permanent Latrine Orderly? PLO is one of the first gags you learn in boot camp. Blitz, by the way, translates into "lightning". Blitz is the mayor of Chicago, where this whole scene takes place, but one remembers that Lightning was a popular character on the early Amos and Andy radio shows. When you have all this popcult in your head, *AMERICAN FLAGG!* gets into gear on many levels. The Golem, for example, would be a double reference: the Marvel comic that died an early death and the Jewish legend of the clay monster that avenged victims of anti-Semitism. We must keep reminding ourselves that Reuben Flagg, like Superman, derives from Jewish intellectualism. Or how about an airline named for stage designer Norman Bel Geddes? Loved Flagg finding himself in bed with a woman doctor who turns out to be a neo-Nazi—you must realize that, though this tale takes place hypothetically in 2031, Chaykin is utilizing ideas and images mainly from the 1930s. It was during this period that Nazism was on the rise in Germany, that fetishism was going full blast in mags like *SILK STOCKINGS*.

And then, as now, "a bunch of trigger-happy white racist sociopaths were running things" in more countries than one.



Police have arrested THE OAZZLER for indecent exposure. Witnesses say the Marvel superhero was "flashing" as she skated down the street yesterday.

Gomer Pyle, a U.S. Marine Corps private, was listed in critical condition at Memphis General Hospital this morning. Pyle was struck in the head by three consecutive lightning bolts last night after saying the phrase "SHAZAM, SHAZAM, SHAZAM!" Sgt. Carter could not be reached for comment.

First Comics has announced plans for their second graphic novel, which will again be drawn by Jerry Bingham. Bingham says the novel will follow the adventures of a barbarian who hasn't showered in three years. "B.O. WOLF" is the tentative title.

Foggy Nelson will become the leader of a faltering Marvel super-team book, in an effort to boost sales. Look for THE NEW PUBLIC DEFENDERS in the new year.

CEREBUS THE AAROVARK fans: Your hero told this columnist some of his favorite things while at lunch the other day. His favorite movie: *THE GREY FOX*. Favorite actor: JOEL GREY. And his favorite rock group? *THE GREY-TFUL DEAD*, of course.

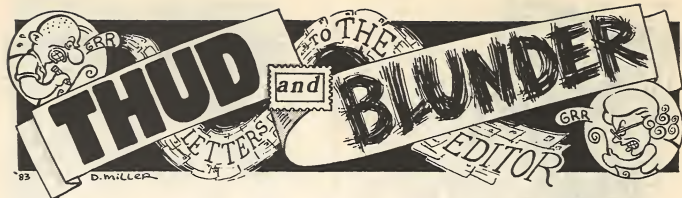
Even with a severe case of bronchitis, SUPERMAN extinguished a fire that spread through New York last weekend. Finding it nearly impossible to use his super-breath to blow the blaze out, the Man of Steel used his quick thinking and super-human powers to douse the flames.

"It was nothing really," he said, "I guzzled a bunch of beer before I heard about the emergency downtown."

NOTHING LIKE A
REFRESHING GLASS
OF AIR!



Until next time, I'm Don Chin, and you aren't! (Luckily.)



Since so many people responded to my plea for letters, I'm going to try to restrict my comments to a bare minimum this time and let the readers take the floor. So without further ado...

Salutations Diana...

I'm a little curious to read what you have to say on comix censorship... It seems to me that most of the fuss is comin' entirely from fandom, and nobody not involved with comics is payin' any attention to what's goin' on... However, if fans keep yelpin' about censorship, sooner or later somebody is gonna take them up on it... If they don't want another comix purge, they should quit carpin' about it where somebody might hear...

On the other hand, it wouldn't hurt if stuff like TWISTED TALES was labelled "For Mature Audiences" although what's mature about anybody who reads that thing is beyond me... Along the same lines, maybe DAZLER and G.I. JOE could be labelled "Frontal Lobotomy Patients Only"...

Interestingly enough, the only two really mature comics being done today are CEREBUS and JOURNEY, and neither one of them requires any censorship whatsoever... I guess it just shows our twisted values that adult has become analogous with smut & trash... HooHah...?!

Joshua Quagnire
Hollywood, CA

Diana:

Thanks for the copy of THE TELEGRAPH WIRE. Matt's uncomplicated review of my art was exactly why I wanted it. I get real tired of hype. When Tom [Yeates] described the review, I wanted to see what Matt had to say.

Frankly, I agree with Matt. Sounds self-effacing as hell, but it's true. In fact, I agree with him on his views on every book covered. Our tastes seem to run along the same lines, at least for the books he tackled in this ish [#14], which makes me view his critique all the more seriously. For whatever drive my layouts and storytelling have, figure work has never been my strong suit. With this in mind, I've made a concerted effort of late towards my figure drawing, and feel that I've made some solid steps (of course, Matt will say "anything would be an improvement"). You should see the effects starting around issue #5 [of GRIMJACK]. Having spent so long concentrating on the storytelling and inking technique I wanted to use in the Grimmer's back-up stories and book, and having, I feel, solved the major questions I was shooting for with both, I'm concentrating more on the drawing. Let me know what you think. Believe me, no one is as critical of my work

as myself--especially after just having purchased and digested the EC WEIRD SCIENCE-FANTASY and SCORCHY SMITH II reprints. Those two collections in themselves are enough to make one give up the fight, throw in the towel, and wonder how you even presumed to pick up a brush. Matt's review, on the other hand, gives me a kick in the ass when I need it, and reminds me that there'll always be something to shoot for.

(Sorry to hear he's quitting, by the way. He's very good--if scathing. But at least he doesn't shoot something down and then tell the reader how he'd do it--a qualm I have with 90% of the comix fan-rag reviewers. But, as I recently noted to a critic who attempted to lambaste my buddy Johnny Ostrander's writing, and then explain how they'd have made it much, much better, "I get the feeling that most people who write reviews about media do so because, for whatever reason, they can't write for it." I get no such indications from Matt's reviews. In fact, he even says as much in his ATLANTIS review.)

And, yeah, I'll work on my figures. Be sure to tell me how I'm doin'!

Good luck!

Timothy Truman
Lake Geneva, WI

Dear Diana,

I'd like to start off by thanking whoever was responsible for sending me TELEGRAPH WIRE #'s 10, 14, and 15. (Gee, don't you just hate it when people send stuff in the mails anonymously?) Gosh, I hope I'm not getting my "donor" in trouble, if it was a "covert operation".

Let's hit the high points, shall we? (With emphasis on the more recent issues.)

Issue #10: Your editorial on women in comics was certainly heartfelt and largely appropriate. However, in comics, as in democracy, I think it's largely true that in the long run the audience gets the performers that the audience deserves. In other words, the comics companies will produce what we want, so it's mostly our fault for what the product is today. (Well, not my fault personally, you understand. More like your fault. You know. All you other people out there. [This demonstrates the "What Can One Person Do?" argument.]

Issue #14: I too am definitely quite sorry to see Capital bite the dust. Apart from the excellent product they produced, there's the fact that they gave me my one and only appearance as a quoted "authority" in an ad. (And, if Rich Bruning is reading this: I'm still waiting for my check. Hey, just kidding, people!) The Quagnire interview was interesting and intermittently humorous, though it was not perhaps as informative as I would have preferred, and

it did seem rather too contrived at times. Lastly (and maybe least): Don Chin's "Sooper Heroes" was a nice change of pace. It's nice to see someone using puns, "the lowest form of humor."

Issue #15: The Dave Scroggy interview was nicely informative, if unfortunately reminiscent at times of his recent Q&A session in COMICS INTERVIEW #11. Jim Friel's piece on printers was also welcome. Let's see more of this "nuts and bolts" stuff. I agree with Bob Schreck that recent movies are more of the superficial sci fi type than in the deeper SF genre. Some of them are enjoyable, but all too often merely as interesting constructs instead of as meaningful stories. It's a shame that this sub-industry has largely taken the easiest-to-copy (and worst) aspects of *Star Wars* as its basis. Why didn't earlier, more serious movies, such as *2001* and *Silent Running* (with Bruce Dern, remember?), inspire some followers?

In general: It's nice to see that Comics & Comix is trying to expand the market for comics. I hope, however, that the small, one- or two-person shop (well run, of course) will continue to have its place. So much of the appeal of the comics sub-culture is based on personalities and personal contacts. (And yes, I'm sure you are quite "personal" at C&C, but you know what I mean.)

Yours truly,

"T.M. Maple"

Weston, Ontario, Canada

P.S. Larger lettercols! (If you print this, I'm sure it'll make the lettercol larger than you ever dreamed --or even wanted.)

I shamelessly admit to being the guilty party who sent you those copies of the WIRE, T.M. It was a cheap (but successful!) ploy to get you to write. After all, how could THE TELEGRAPH WIRE be truly "legitimate" in the field without a letter from T.M. Maple?

Dear Diana,

I don't know how proper it is for staff members to write letters to the editor, but I would like to amend something which you said in your letters column.

In your response to Gary Groth's eloquent missive, you mentioned that I was leaving my column until I could "work up some more enthusiasm for our industry and its product." I am afraid that people will infer from that statement that I do not like comics, which is untrue. There is a distinct difference between burning out on comics reviews and burning out on comics; my reason for leaving was the former. As you know, and as your readers can tell from reading both my later reviews and those of people who have been doing it for years, there comes a point when one can no longer say anything new about an industry which, in most cases, is fairly stagnant. True, I could review CEREBUS or JOURNEY issue after issue and speak of innovation and imagination, but comic reviews of most new material consist of nothing more than "I liked the story, I didn't like the art," with some literary name-dropping thrown in for good measure ("Hey, folks, I took college English!").

Movies and other forms of entertainment have reached levels of subtlety and sophistication which most comics have not even approached--and indeed, to compare new comics with classic movies and books, as some of our more pretentious reviewers are wont to do, is ridiculous. The intent of my column was to remove some of the somber, pompous air of reviews and to let people know that most comics are not, in fact, mature art forms, and that to pretend they are is self-delusion. When I found myself impatiently

repeating my message, and getting sloppier about doing so, I thought it time to leave. My affection for such titles as WILL EISNER'S QUARTERLY, CEREBUS, JOURNEY, and yes, even LOVE AND ROCKETS remains.

Matt Denn
Berkeley, CA

Dear Diana,

As usual, THE TELEGRAPH WIRE gave me lots of good reading. I'll miss Matt Denn's reviews although I don't necessarily agree with them. On the subject of whether or not he should read the complete story, I must agree with you and Gary Groth. Ok, it may be time-consuming to finish a story that you already know at page 3 is mediocre but you have an obligation to your audience to finish the job.

On another subject, I was at Creation's last New York convention and found myself deeply disturbed (in addition to being incredibly bored after less than an hour). I wandered the dealers' room in search of some alternative/independent titles I had missed along the way and couldn't find them. I saw no copies of LOVE AND ROCKETS, only one dealer had THE SPIRIT #4, one had STEVE CANYON #5, and a handful had some, not all, of the Archie hero books. Sure, everyone was loaded with Marvels and DCs, but try and find something different--forget it.

I had campaigned long and hard in COMICS SCENE to convince readers and publishers to try different things but there is a serious lack of support on the part of the retailers. They have an obligation to keep the entire comics field alive, otherwise their own livelihood will be cut short. THE X-MEN will sell in the hundreds of thousands for only so long. We must expose readers to other titles from all publishers. Something as wonderful as LOVE AND ROCKETS won't ever find its audience if the guys selling the comics don't stock it and, maybe more importantly, promote it. Talk to the clientele, tell them about different books, maybe even run specials (as I notice Comics & Comix does).

Enough. Sometimes I feel like a lone voice yelling in a void. Anyway, thanks for wonderful reading and keep them coming!

Best,

Bob Greenberger
DC Comics Inc.
New York, NY

Hey Bob, you'll just have to move to California and shop at Comics & Comix, where we do it right! I even just happen to know of an apartment that's coming up for grabs!

Dear Diana:

Your interview with Dave Scroggy raises many questions. First off, Mr. Scroggy states that the print runs for Pacific titles are "very close to the actual orders." Every distributor knows that there is a plentiful supply of independents as well as "major" comics out in the market. Speculators, like myself, know that the market for independents is still not proven yet (except for AMERICAN FLAGG!). We also know that most of the majors' (Marvel and DC) books do or will sell well on the back-issue market. Every dealer knows that the "bread and butter" of the comics business is in new comics. The prices for all back-issues are at a depressed level. Thus, speculators cannot afford to speculate heavily into independents. The independent publishers are not doing one thing to help the speculators. For instance, the print runs are simply too large--there are huge back-stocks of independent books accumulating in distributor

and publisher warehouses. Pacific Comics Distributors' wholesale catalog for July clearly proves this point. On page 5 is a "Pacific backlist". It offers to PC's regular accounts just about every PC comic ever printed at their dealers' regular discount schedule, with the exception of four books--which are offered at the cover price. These books being offered are complete runs of ALIEN WORLDS, CAPTAIN VICTORY, SILVERHEELS, and STARSLAYER (#1-6), to name just a few. If you check with other distributors, they will tell you just about the same thing. Many of the independent publishers have backstocks in their own warehouses. If a distributor runs out, they simply call up the publisher for a re-order. (Just check with Bud Plant. He will tell you the story.) The supply is just too much. This excess supply is keeping back-issue prices down. If prices are low, speculators are not going to buy heavily. If Pacific really wants their books to be collector's items and thus increase the speculation, tell them to cut the print runs "close" to the actual pre-orders. Mr. Scroggy stated that the print runs are already close to the actual orders. Apparently they are not close enough to encourage speculation.

Pacific Comics does publish some of the finest comics on the market today. If PC is to survive, all of the people in the business must work together. Everyone from the publisher down to the small dealer/speculator must work together, especially in difficult times. With the glut out there now, ALIEN WORLDS, GROOT, and SOMERSET HOLMES will never become "prime collectibles". Mr. Scroggy also stated that STARSLAYER #3 (second appearance of the Rocketeer) is a "bonafide hard-to-find" book. Hell, PC Distributors are wholesaling it out at \$1.00 a copy.

Al Lee
San Francisco, CA

Diana:

Picked up an issue of THE TELEGRAPH WIRE at San Diego--John's comments on the industry and some of the letters really caught my eye. Our company has tried since 1970 to stay on our own path and still promote comics, science fiction, and fantasy--through our comics, books, magazines, and newspapers--we've spent thousands of dollars and millions (it seems) of hours trying to make changes in the field.

Our hard work and our dedication is paying off--my predictions about the market are proving correct. We've been serious about the graphic novel format and in increasing fandom from the mainstream public. 97% of comics fans being "men" is a sick stat.

Your efforts through the stores and Bud Plant's support of our books and UNCLE JAM promise to help create a much needed new kind of market for the field. It will happen.

Sincerely,

Phil Yeh
Fragments West
Long Beach, CA

Dear Diana,

I discovered your magazine in THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE and have ended my subscription to CBG because I think the WIRE is much better. CBG took about two months through the mail and that was really irritating.

I like the WIRE so much because it's different each time and contains interviews which are very interesting. I also like the fact that you spend some pages on science fiction and underground comix. It's a pity that Matt Denn won't be contributing anymore, but now I am looking forward to whoever will replace him.

Now that I am finally writing to you, I might as well write a little about the situation of comics in Holland and in Australia.

At the moment I'm living in Australia but used to live in Holland where I was a member of a comic club, "Het Stripschap". The club has approximately 1700 members. Each year there is one big convention which attracts about 15,000 visitors for two and a half days. During the year there are some small conventions which attract a few hundred visitors. Comics in Holland are really thriving. Comics are published in a format similar to the American editions of ASTERIX published by Corgaud. Comics are one of the things I miss now that I am living in Australia.

In Australia the situation is totally opposite. There are hardly any comics around here from Australian artists; you could say that the market here is made up of American comics and some English ones. Comics in Australia aren't as big as in Holland and, I assume, as in America. Australian comics certainly have a very interesting past, but those older ones are quite hard to find.

In Holland we have two major comic magazines, *Stripfiet* and *Stripschrift*, which are similar to, say, THE COMICS JOURNAL. Here in Australia there are only two such magazines as far as I know, THE AUSTRALIAN COMIC COLLECTOR and THE FOX, which are good but less professional--though that doesn't matter to me.

In Australia there are some specialized comic shops but they are very hard to find. In Holland I know of about 25 of those shops all through the country, with Amsterdam as its center with seven shops.

Comics are quite accepted in Holland by the general public and we don't have trouble with the rating system simply because we haven't got any ratings on our comics. Nevertheless, there sometimes are some problems with certain comics, mainly those concerned with sex. About two years ago there was some trouble with illegal publications of satirical comics which made fun of some established comics and the publishers of those comics didn't quite like that and got everything settled in court.

Well, I took your words of sending a letter to heart and it wasn't all that bad for a first time. I think you're doing a really good job with the WIRE.

Best,

René Westhoff
Victoria, Australia

Dear Diana:

Thought I'd write so I can continue to receive complimentary copies of the wonderful TELEGRAPH WIRE. First of all, your apologies are all accepted. I personally grant full and complete absolution, plus special dispensation to perform four more social and/or editorial errors.

NEXUS and BADGER are in production. We held our final editorial meeting at the Belvedere Oasis, a MoJo spanning lovely I-90 halfway between Chicago and Madison. NEXUS #7, which ships on December 4th (count on it!), will contain 28 pages of totally new material, including about four pages of recap to acquaint new readers with the story.

Keep up the good work, and keep those Diana Schutz buttons, posters, and pin-ups coming.

Best,

Mike Baron
Madison, WI

Keep those WIRE words coming, folks! Write to: THE TELEGRAPH WIRE, 2461 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley, CA, 94704.

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